

# The Making of a Name - Part 2

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[ 0 : 01 ] Well, sometimes life throws up the most unlikely winners. Many of you would probably remember Stephen Bradbury, Australia's most unlikely gold medal winner at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

Now, this is such a great moment in Australian sporting history, and I've tried to get a gold T-shirt, but this is the best I can do. My daughter had a pair of green pants as well, but I thought, no, I'll look like a carrot.

But this is such a great moment in Australian sporting history that I thought would relive the moment together. So I've got a video of Stephen, so enjoy. That's it?

All right, thanks, Peng. You ought to love it. In fact, when he did the interviews, he actually said it was all planned.

But what's so amazing is that this unlikely win was actually preceded by even more unlikely events. So first, Bradbury only got into the finals because there was a similar pileup in the semifinals.

[ 1 : 17 ] Two people had crashed, and he came in second. So he just got into the finals. And then in order to get into the semifinals, somebody was actually disqualified in the quarterfinals that enabled him to get into the semifinals.

So he was actually just really lucky to be in the finals, let alone win it. It's just amazing, this whole chain of events. Well, we're going to look at a person today who the odds at greatness were even longer.

And his name is Abraham, as you might guess. And we're going to pick up his story at verse 26 of chapter 11. And we're going to see why he's God's unlikely choice for greatness. Now, first, we see that even though Abraham's name appears first, he's not actually Terah's firstborn, and hence not in the line to take over the inheritance.

Now, we actually have to do a bit of maths to work this out. But if you read chapter 11 and verse 32, it says that Terah was 205 years old when he died in Haran.

And then if you go on to verse 4 of chapter 12, we know that the oldest Abraham could have been when that happened was 75 years old, because it says there in verse 4.

[ 2 : 32 ] So when Abraham was born, the youngest Terah could have been was 205 minus 75, 130 years old. You with me?

But we read here in verse 26 that after Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abraham, Nehor, and Haran, which means that Terah's first son couldn't have been Abraham, had to be either Nehor or Haran.

So Abraham's name may come first in that listing, but it's not because of birth order, but merely to signal his favored position before God. And if you're a careful reader of Genesis, that wouldn't surprise you, because God has a habit of choosing the younger over the older.

So last week in chapter 10 and verse 21, Shem, we think, was younger than Japheth. And God earlier bypassed Cain for his younger brother Seth after he had killed the other younger brother Abel.

And if you keep reading Genesis, you'll find that God has a habit of choosing the younger over the older. So Isaac before Ishmael, Jacob before Esau, and Joseph instead of all the older brothers.

[ 3 : 43 ] That was what God was in a habit of doing, bypassing those we expect to succeed for those we don't. But second, we also discover that Abraham is married to a barren wife.

And the words in verse 30, Now Sarah was barren, she had no children, is meant to stick out like a sore thumb. Because this statement comes after 15 or more verses where every person named not only had a son, but had other sons and daughters as well.

So Shem, when he was 100, had Athosad, and then had other sons and daughters. When Athosad was 35, he had Shela, and then had other sons and daughters. And on and on it goes.

And before this chapter, we had last week the table of nations where individuals fathered whole nations. As former treasurer Peter Costello once said as he was trying to get Australian women to have more children, population is destiny.

Populate or perish. Was it his other way of saying it? The more people a nation has, the greater it tends to be. And notice too how this genealogy is actually different from the earlier one in chapter 5.

[ 4 : 55 ] The early one from Adam to Noah had this constant refrain which Jeff mentioned, that after people had children, they died. And then he died. And then he died. And then he died.

But notice that's not here in this genealogy. Instead, the focus here is on life, on having sons and daughters, of fulfilling God's creation mandate. So the fact that Sarai was barren didn't bode well at all.

Even Haran, who has died, we read, had a son in Lot. And further, Abraham wasn't a spring chicken either. That is, he wasn't young.

So all of them had sons in their 30s. Even Terah had a son by the time he was 70.

But Abraham was 75 and had no son. So all the signs then were pointing to Abraham's name, ending with him without a son to carry it on. Now the third thing about Abraham is that God chose Abraham even though he was an idol worshipper.

[ 6 : 02 ] Nowhere up to now does it say that Abraham knew the Lord. In fact, we know that he didn't. For in the book of Joshua, in chapter 24 and verse 2, and I've got the verse up on slide, Joshua said to all the people, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says, Long ago your forefathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nehor, lived beyond the rivers and worshipped other gods.

But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the river and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. And actually, archaeologists actually have confirmed what Joshua said because they've dug up in the city of Ur artifacts to show that people actually worshipped Nana, not their grandmother.

But a moon god. And the names Terah, Sarai, Milka, Ishka, they're all named sort of after foreign gods.

So on all accounts, Abraham was an idol worshipper just like everyone else in Ur. But can you see the picture that the Bible is painting that here was Abraham, really a nobody, heading for obscurity in history with no one to carry on his name.

And yet here we are, thousands of years later, thousands of miles away, talking about Abraham. All because God chose him, plucked him out of obscurity, and made him great.

[ 7 : 24 ] And so for him, it all begins in Genesis 12 and verse 1, where the Lord speaks to Abraham for the first time. And this is the first time since verse 10 that the Lord appears.

The first time in ten generations that the Lord speaks. So verse 1, the Lord had said to Abraham, leave your country, your people, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse. And all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

There's three things I want to say about these words. The first is the call to leave. God says, leave your country, your people, and your father's household. And in part, I think this is to remove Abraham from his idols, for him to leave his fellow idol worshippers behind.

And that's not to say that when he gets to Canaan, there wouldn't be idols there. No, there will still be. But Abraham needed to have a clean break from his own idols, from his past, to renounce the idols he already had.

[ 8 : 29 ] God was to, not to be just one more God he had to worship. No, he has to be the one and only God that Abraham was going to worship. But God also told Abraham to leave because he wanted Abraham to realize that from now on, every blessing that he gets was going to come from God.

Whatever land he owned, whatever reputation he had in that land, he was to leave that behind so that God could start with a clean slate and pour out his blessings on him.

And these blessings God now spells out in our second point. But as we read, I want to realize that at this stage, it's just the promise of blessing. It's not actually the blessings themselves.

But whatever Abraham had been lacking until now, God was going to bless him with. Land, children, a great name. In fact, I see it as a bit of a package deal.

For the land will be given to his offspring and together, they will be a great nation or they will be a great nation in that land and therefore make Abraham's name great.

[ 9 : 38 ] Abraham did not appear in chapter 10, but God is saying that he will take his place among the nations, the table of nations, as it were. And whereas with Babel, the people wanted to make a name for themselves, in Abraham's case, it is God who will make Abraham's name great.

But notice that his greatness is not for himself, to draw attention to himself. Instead, God blesses Abraham so that he might in turn be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you.

And those who curse Abraham, God says, God will curse. Abraham is going to be God's channel blessing to the world. And of course, we all know that this finds its fulfillment in Jesus, a descendant of Abraham.

And as we saw last week in Acts chapter 2, it is only in this name, the name of Jesus, people who call on the name of Jesus who will be saved. But it's only a promise at this stage because God is seeking from Abraham a response of faith.

Abraham had to believe and obey in faith. That is, physically pack up and leave the land of Ur, leave the security of a home and leave the reputation he had in Ur.

[ 10 : 56 ] Now, many people think that Abraham heard God's call in Haran because that's how the story flows. But actually, Abraham heard it when he was back in Ur. And we know that because Stephen tells us in Acts chapter 7 and verse 2, where he says, So what must have happened is that Abraham must have persuaded Terah, his father, to leave with him.

Lot must have come along because his father had died. But Nahor, we know, stayed behind because we remember that later on, Abraham sends his servant back to Nahor to get a wife for Isaac.

But when they got to Haran, which I've got on the map, it's up in the north, Terah must have decided then to just go no further. And so settled there. And we don't know how long this was, but all the while that Abraham was there, really all he had was the memory of God's words to him.

That promise. And he was just holding on to them and biding his time. But when Terah finally died, verse 4, Abraham left as the Lord had told him.

He remembered the Lord's words. And Lot went with him. And then verse 5, He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan and they arrived there.

[ 12 : 40 ] And yet, even as they arrived there, there was no land for them. We know from verse 6 that the Canaanites were already there at the time. But what the Lord does is appear to Abraham again in verse 7 to reconfirm the promise to your offspring I will give this land.

But even so, it's still a promise, isn't it? Just a promise. But what Abraham does is that he builds an altar to the Lord in faith.

And from there, he moves to the hills between Bethel and Ai and again builds another altar and calls on the name of the Lord before he continues towards the Negev in the south. This is his first survey of the land that he has been promised.

But as yet, there is still no children and there is no land to take possession of. No great city to speak of like Nimrod. Just a tent, a temporary home.

Unprotected, no defenses from enemies. A tent and a promise from God. Friends, as Christians, we're called to do the same and that is to hold on to the promises of God.

[ 13 : 54 ] I mean, ask yourself, what tangible thing, what physical thing do we really have to show others, to show our friends that the God we worship is real, that the promises that he's made of salvation are true?

We don't have physical evidence, do we? All we have, and it's not only, but it is sufficient and powerful, but all we have is the written word of God.

We have the promise of God, the words that said, a man called Jesus, we've been told, pitched his tent among us, died to save us and rose again.

And the promise is that if we trust in him, we will have salvation. And we are full of confidence in that word because as we hear it, we hear God's voice in it.

But because it's only a promise, we need to be like Abraham and hold on to it through the ups and downs of life, through the waiting, through the uncertainties, through the not knowing.

[ 14 : 59 ] I'm not saying that it's a promise and therefore we don't have the reality of that promise, but what I'm saying is that it is not seen as with a lot of other things that we can see around us. We require faith, in other words, to take hold of God's promises, to hold on even when there's doubts and fears, when even other things promise more security, when there is a temptation to seek for the more instant rewards that are all around us.

We are asked instead to trust and believe that what God has said is true. A short while back, I heard a story of someone who went to the slums in India and they spoke to someone who had lived on the streets for many years.

This person who was living on the streets shared of a time when she actually forgot her name because for many years she just didn't meet anyone who knew her.

And as I heard that story, I was deeply struck and deeply sad to, you know, for years not have someone you meet know you and then to the extent that you forget your own name.

And all of us deep down want people to know us. We want to have our names known by them, to be loved by people who know us. And while I'm sure many of you don't seek fame, deep down we still want to be remembered, to know that our lives come for something and mean something to someone, to know that we've made a mark on this world.

[ 16 : 35 ] So what are we to make of that desire? Because last week I said it was futile to want to make a name for ourselves just like the Tower of Babel. But if God made Abraham's name great, then is it wrong to want that same thing for ourselves?

Well, for that I want to ask you to turn with me to Revelation chapter 3, which was our second reading, 1,217, 1 to 1,7. What we have at the start of Revelation are the seven letters to the seven churches given by Jesus to John, where Jesus sort of assesses the churches and the people.

And at the end of each letter, Jesus offers a reward for those who overcome. So you'll find at the end a sentence that goes something like this, to him who overcomes, you know, something, something, some reward will be given or something will happen to them.

And when we hear the word overcome, we may think of physical things like conquering the world or defeating an enemy or winning a war or something. But as you read the letters carefully, what you'll find is that to overcome is essentially to just be faithful, to hear God's word and continue and continue to obey in spite of everything.

And in particular, it is to trust in God's promise about Jesus, to trust in the gift of life and forgiveness that's found in him. So we have, for example, in verse 3 of chapter 3, the church in Sardis, the command, remember therefore what you have received and heard, obey it and repent.

[ 18 : 17 ] And then to the church in Philadelphia, verse 8, I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Verse 10, since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

Can you see what overcoming is? It's about trusting in God's word, living a life of faith, patiently waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises. Do these things and we will be overcomers.

Now because there are seven churches and there are also seven descriptions of rewards for those who overcome, I don't think it's actually seven different rewards, just seven ways of describing the same reward.

And the two I want to look at tonight are the ones that were described to the church in Sardis in Philadelphia. So if you go back again in verse 5, Jesus says this, He who overcomes will like them be dressed in white.

I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my father and his angels. He who is in here, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church. I said last week that if we are to make a name for ourselves, I recall it's a bit like my daughter trying to write her name on the sand at the beach.

[ 19 : 34 ] It's quickly washed away, isn't it, by the tide of time. But here we have, instead, how our names will be great by being in the book of life, never to be blot out, never to be washed away.

And Jesus even goes on to say that he will acknowledge our names before his father and the angels, not just now, but for eternity, for all time.

Then with Philadelphia, this is what Jesus says in verse 12, Him who overcomes, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God.

And I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. If you've seen photos or been to Greece and Rome, you'd see those ancient temples where some of the pillars and arches still stand and sometimes you see words inscribed on them.

That's the image here. To the one who overcomes, God will make a pillar in his temple, part of God's very house itself. We're not even just inhabitants of God's house.

[ 20 : 47 ] We're going to be part of that house. But notice what is being inscribed on the pillar. Not the name of the one who overcomes, but the name of God, the name of God's city.

Do you see what God is saying? That God is actually going to give us and inscribe on us his name, or to be more precise, Jesus will. Many of you will know, I'm sure, that Hollywood's most eligible bachelor has just got married.

Any guesses who that is? George Clooney? Yes? No? No? He's not that eligible? No? Well, most of you know George Clooney, right?

Yes. George Clooney has just got married to Amal Alamuddin, I think is the right producer. Yep, that's her name. And about a week or so ago, and not that I, you know, follow Twitter or anything, but social media lit up because apparently Amal decided to change her name to Clooney, her married name.

And as you expect, and some of you might be that way persuaded as well, many female writers were aghast. I mean, how could she, they wrote. Doesn't she know that this is a sign of patriarchal bondage?

[ 22 : 02 ] She's successful in her own right. Why does she need to take Clooney's name? And then others retorted on the other side and said, oh, but it's her own choice. That's what it is, right? A woman's got to have a choice, so choice means she can choose either.

And anyway, Alamuddin is her father's name. It's another patriarchal name anyway. So it's just one male name for another. So what's the big deal? Anyway, so on and on it goes. A lot of comment and blogs and whatever.

But the point I'm making is that I want to just come back to Revelations. And the biggest marriage in history, apart from George and Amal, it's not that big, is the one between Christ and his church.

And as Jesus marries his church, God gives us, his church, his name, the name of Jesus. And so it doesn't matter whether you're Hall or Halliburton, a Davy or DePaul, when we become a Christian, we take on Jesus' name.

And friends, it's a big deal for God to actually give us his name. Because time and time again, if you look in the Old Testament, God defends his name. He defends the honor and the glory of his name.

[ 23 : 15 ] He doesn't give it away lightly. And yet, beginning here in Genesis chapter 12, God chose to give his name to a nobody, to Abraham. Because from here on in, he's happy to be known as the God of Abraham.

Not the God of Nimrod, not the God of the Pharaohs, but the God of Abraham. A nobody. The God of a nobody. He says, I will be your God and your descendants will be my people.

And so likewise, when we believe in Jesus, and as the church we're wedded to him, we take on his name. And when we take on someone's name, we take on his inheritance, we take on his glory, we take on his greatness.

And so we have a great name in Jesus. And so I had a chuckle really when I, you know, read that whole thing, the food furor over Amal. Because if you think about it, they're just really fighting over crumbs, aren't they?

I mean, what is Clooney, what is Alamuddin alongside the name of Jesus? I mean, which name would you rather have? I know I'll take the name of Jesus any day. Which is exactly what happens to us, male or female, when we trust in him, we take on Jesus' name.

[ 24 : 30 ] So friends, let us hold on to the promises of God, of Christ, just like Abraham, waiting patiently, living by faith, rejecting, renouncing the idols, living, as we sang in that song, by faith and not by sight, so that when we overcome, our names will be written in the book of life.

and like Abraham, we too will have a great name. Let's pray. Father, we thank you again for the name of Jesus.

We praise that name and we give that name glory because it is a great name and it is a name by which everyone on earth is saved.

And Lord, we thank you that if we put our trust in you, you write our names in the book of life. That even though the world does not see it now, we will have a place in your temple, a position of greatness, as it were, not because of ourselves, but because of Jesus.

And yet people of great significance, known by God, loved by you. So help us, Lord, to cling on to the promises in the Bible and the promises of Christ.

[ 25 : 55 ] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.